

NextGen Housing:

**WHAT MAKES A
VIBRANT
NEIGHBOURHOOD**

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BRANDING

- Vibrant communities have a brand narrative that is a compilation of origin, creed, context, symbols, and action that attracts people and commerce, and consumes resources. They seem to happen organically but, in fact, are developed through a systemic construct (Hanlon 2008, p.81).
- The brand narrative begins with an origin that relates the public saga and gives residents a role in the great continuum of community experience (Hanlon 2008, p.81).
- Vibrant communities stand for something. They have ideals and a reason to exist, no matter how self-serving or laboured. For example, New York City never rests as a centre for finance, art, theatre, food and fashion. (Hanlon 2008, p.81)
- Vibrant communities possess icons that signify what they are as places. London for example has Buckingham palace.
- Even smaller communities seek out monuments, landmarks, or public figures to differentiate themselves.
- When people come to think of destinations for their honeymoon, holiday or business, people normally associate a city or place with a set of images or qualities. This is suggestive of a form of city branding. But is this applicable for any city?
- To put it simply branding is a term that is used to describe a place that when mentioned instantly evokes a memory of a certain aspect or image that is known to be synonymous with that specific area or neighbourhood, for example New York City and Times Square, or the myriad of illuminated signs on strips such as those in Las Vegas or Shanghai.
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INTRODUCTION

Vibrant communities seem to happen organically but in fact are developed through a systemic construct. It is difficult to pinpoint a set of criteria for creating a vibrant neighbourhood, as the topic of vibrancy is subjective. After reviewing several newspaper articles and journals, common elements of vibrant neighbourhoods, communities and cities were identified, and analysed in order to present our findings in this research chapter.

In the following pages, our findings on what makes a neighbourhood vibrant will be based on these elements including:

- Branding
- Community Values
- Icons
- Rituals
- Lexicon
- Nonbelievers
- Leaders

These elements will be vital in validating the vibrancy of the neighbourhood. However, there is a disclaimer on our findings. The overall vibrancy of a neighbourhood is certainly based on the population and it is up to urban planners, architects, local and federal governments to facilitate neighbourhoods, communities and cities with these elements.

Is there a common denominator for vibrant neighbourhoods?

WHAT IS A VIBRANT NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Ultimately, the objective of this research chapter is to investigate what makes a vibrant neighbourhood. However, before any recommendations for a vibrant neighbourhood, we need to define what a vibrant neighbourhood is. These definitions include:

- Throbbing with energy or activity, buzz and lively are terms used pretty loosely to describe vibrancy.
- Has spirit-shared values, trust in one's neighbours, and a vision filled with hope and dreams. (Hanlon 2008, p.81).
- Beehives/Network of commerce, culture and opportunity – vibrant places that fire imaginations and have gravitational pull. They develop a culture, a dignity and a way of life that is intensely emotional and spiritually gratifying, to the point where People feel content and happy: they believe they could never live anywhere else. (Hanlon 2008, p.81).
- Vibrant communities have vibrant belief systems. Once a belief system is constructed, it attracts people who share those beliefs. These people, in turn, develop a deep-skin sense of community that mere streets and buildings cannot account for. (Hanlon 2008, p.81).
- These belief systems determine how people feel about a place when deciding where to live, work and play. (Hanlon 2008, p.81).

WHY VIBRANCY?

- Liveability is about better quality of life for citizens in their city or community
- Vibrancy contributes to the social stability and economic development of a neighbourhood, community and city
- Retaining residents and attracting commerce to sustain and propel the local economy
- Individuals are left to suffer if there is no vibrancy in the community. They would feel no sense of belonging, no excitement, no interest and no opportunity available.



Cultural Vibrancy - <http://img2.travelblog.org/Photos/11053/81204/t/-499373-The-vibrancy-of-the-parade-1.jpg>

LEGIBILITY AND SAFETY

- It is critical that a neighbourhood is legible and safe in order for it to be vibrant as people will not inhabit or visit an unsafe neighbourhood.
- Legibility of a neighbourhood can be greatly aided through the implementation of a series of well-defined cognitive elements such as edges, nodes, landmarks, gateways and districts that mark various areas and fringes of the neighbourhood.
- Legibility and safety can also be improved through populating of an area and giving people a reason and a place to spend time within the neighbourhood can do this and the use of various street furniture provides a place for people to congregate and interact with each other, leading to a vibrant area.
- Night time safety can be greatly improved through the implementation of interesting and innovative street lighting.
- Legibility and safety can also be influenced through the integration of local public art that may be used to act as a method of way finding and animating various public centres.
- Building and street signage can be designed and organised in such a way as to reduce signage clutter and to promote uniformity and consistency into the overall composition of a building, while also serving a clear purpose as an indicator of the nature of various buildings and their inhabitants and services.
- Illuminated signage and artworks may also be implemented as safety apparatus during the night.



The Las Vegas Strip - <http://www.thetravelpeach.com/united-states-vacations/las-vegas/las-vegas-strip.jpg>



Times Square - http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa-/New_York_Times_Square.JPG

MIXED USE

- Great and vibrant neighbourhoods include a mixture of a vibrant mixed-use core, excellent connectivity, diversity, legibility, and sustainability.
- The vibrant mixed-use core is central to the neighbourhood and must contain a mix of uses and varying densities that are able to support these uses, while also optimising pedestrian activity, minimising vehicular and pedestrian conflicts and focusing on active public spaces.
- A vibrant mixed-use core is made up of a series of buildings that are designed to define the street and also serving as a place for people to gather and meet friends through the implementation of pedestrian oriented and human scaled ground floor amenities that are well lit and that allow street life to prosper.
- The main aim of the vibrant mixed-use core is to create dynamic public gathering spaces at points where streets intersect through reinforcing the neighbourhood corners and nurturing creative active spaces.
- Residents, workers and visitors will all need access to and have opportunities to engage in learning and cultural activities, social infrastructure and services and economic opportunities to pursue healthy lifestyle options.
- A healthy mix of residents will ensure a vibrant city that remains open and safe to all comers at all times. Developers have a role to play in providing housing that caters for those who now need affordable housing (Grollo, The Age, 14 May 2008).



Mixed use developments - <http://www.arnoldimaging.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/villagegreen-01-small.jpg>



Mixed use developments - <http://www.arnoldimaging.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/zone-5.jpg>

DIVERSITY

- Diversity within vibrant neighbourhoods can take the part of diverse people, cultures, activities, experiences, spaces, and building types.
- Diversity adds to the vibrancy of neighbourhoods as it attracts a wider variety of people to the area and hence a greater vibrant cultural mix is present that adds a necessary character to a specific area.
- The effect of populating these areas cannot be stressed enough as the implementation of various diverse activities serves to draw diverse crowds of people and this results in a follow on effect in terms of developing a vibrant neighbourhood.
- Diverse neighbourhoods aim to foster an inclusive and interactive community which attracts and retains a pool of potential employees and residents from ethnically diverse groups while also creating and supporting a climate of inclusiveness and of intellectual and cultural diversity.
- Diversity is a key value in and of itself.
- Diversity is an important value in creating and nurturing a broad community that is reflective of the world that we strive to serve and reach.



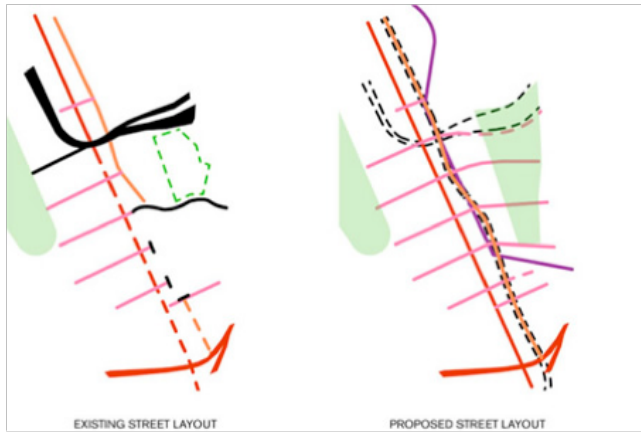
Safety through street lights - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/48353028@N00/3278557089/>



Legibility - Sydney 2030 - Local Communities PDF Document

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Vibrant communities must have adequate connectivity and accessibility in order to maintain their strong community spirit and this connectivity and accessibility is achieved through a well designed and planned hierarchy of streets that are walkable, safe, accessible, and have a direct focus on active public spaces and incorporate interesting architecture.
- The main elements of a great vibrant street include adequate lighting, on-street parking, sidewalk buffers, wide sidewalks, interesting landscaping, well-designed street furniture, interesting building facades, bike lanes, good crossings, and narrow roadways.
- Architecture and orientation also plays a major role in the connectivity and accessibility of a vibrant neighbourhood and ways to complement neighbourhood vibrancy through architecture include designing facades and entries to be inviting and easily accessible to passing pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists, and also through an effort to make the ground floor of the building visibly transparent to promote interaction between the building and the street.
- Transport is a major factor in vibrant communities and it is essential that all modes of transport operate efficiently in these areas through the provision of regular and adequate public bus, train, tram transport, and various on and off street facilities for motorists and cyclists including shared use footpaths, shoulder bicycle lanes, and adequate and well priced parking facilities.



Accessibility - Sydney 2030 - Local Communities PDF Document



Connectivity - Sydney 2030 - Local Communities PDF Document

CASE STUDY: **NEWTOWN**

- King Street is Newtown's great public asset and its strongest urban element—a fine-grained and sinuous retail strip that trace the ridge line. It is a socially diverse, public promenade, serviced by two train lines (Newtown and Erskineville stations) and multiple bus routes.
- The consistent narrow frontages with relatively few large retail tenancies create a collage of interesting retail, fashion, restaurants and entertainment venues reflective of the local cosmopolitan community and its role as a regional attractor. The future of these streets should prioritise the pedestrian, enhance public space and improve the links between the railway station and Australia Square. Ideas to encourage spaces for small businesses, fresh food markets and creative activities should be explored.
- Newtown's main road, King Street, was the first suburban shopping centre outside the City Centre, and today this thoroughfare is still a shoppers' mecca – lined with hundreds of stores, cafes and restaurants.
- The Newtown area has long been a very diverse melting pot, with people of many ethnic backgrounds, and this vibrant local colour and 'flavour' extends into neighbouring suburbs – MacDonalddown, Golden Grove, Camperdown, Darlington, Alexandria, St Peters, Eveleigh, the home of the impressive Australian Technology Park, and particularly Erskineville, the setting for yet more shops, restaurants and lively pubs.
- King Street is a shopper's delight! There are 20 or so art and craft galleries, music, gift and homewares shops, new and recycled fashion stores for the young and funky, delicatessens and many bookstores.



Diversity - https://our.ptsem.edu/UploadedFiles/Student%20Services/Multicultural_Relations/Globe2.jpg



Diversity - http://www.kappadelta.org/assets/1280/diverse_group.jpg

OTHER CRITERIA

COMMUNITY VALUE/CREED

- Vibrant communities stand for something. They have ideals and a reason to exist, no matter how self-serving or laboured. For example, New York City never rests as a centre for finance, art, theatre, food and fashion. (Hanlon 2008, p.81)
- The apotheosis of a community is based on security, trust and belonging.

RITUALS

- Rituals – the repeated positive or negative experiences and rites that residents participate in.
- Is it a critical element in designing the social fabric of vibrant communities
- Negative rituals can include traffic jams, riotous soccer matches.
- Positive rituals include voting, celebrations and festivals e.g. Mardi Gras, New Years Eve Fireworks from Sydney Harbour Bridge, all of which binds people as a community

LEXICON

- Vibrant communities have a lexicon that their members understand. For example, New Yorkers know how to measure “door to door” and who constitutes the “bridge-tunnel” crowd. Londoners and Melbournians know what to do on Boxing Day.

SUSTAINABILITY

- A sustainable vibrant community is one that considers various environmental factors that include its orientation in terms of solar and wind impacts, ecological infrastructure for storm water, waste water, and energy.



Rituals - <http://envirostats.files.wordpress.com/2007/12/sydney-fireworks.jpg>



Sustainability - <http://sorinplaton.files.wordpress.com/2008/-03/sustanaible-1.jpg>

TRANSFERABILITY

Are techniques and criteria that make certain cities or neighbourhoods vibrant able to be transferred to other areas in the hope to increase their vibrancy?

In an interview transcript with Dr. Jose Gamez, Phd. Architecture University of North Carolina, Charlotte by Julia Winfield-Pfefferkorn for a Masters thesis, Dr. Gamez responds to the above question, 'look at the way that skylines and historic districts have been used in postcards, magazines, and in the media. Urban images have long played important roles in the production of recognizable moments for popular consumption. This is certainly a form of branding.'

Certain cities have such iconic reputations that allow them to be branded more easily than others. For instance, New York with Times Square suggesting it is a city that never sleeps, Paris with the Eiffel Tower showing its elegance and sophistication. These are cities with postcard memorable elements. So, are these elements transferable?

Certain cities cannot be branded the same way as other cities simply because they are not populated with enough symbolic architecture or cultural history. For example, the new state government and local council measures are aligning in a move to turn laneways of Sydney into a Melbourne-like hub of laneway culture, micro bars and so-called 'fusion bars'.

However the irony can be seen in the Sydney Morning Herald article, 'Laneway bar reaches dead end' dated July 1 2009. Josephine Tovey writes, 'Sydney's attempt at creating a laneway bar culture has been stalled, after one of the first new bars closed after two weeks and can reopen only with main-road access.' Because of complaints from residents about noise, laneway bars in Sydney have been put on hold. Evidently, the quest for laneway culture in a bid to transfer Melbourne's culture to Sydney is not working.



King Street - <http://www.juileeprior.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/martin-for-rb-copy1.jpg>



King Street - http://www.sydneymarchitecture.com/images/800px-King_Street_Newtown.jpg

CASE STUDY: NEWTOWN

- Other outlets sell antiques and collectables, and the St Peters end of King Street has become renowned for its quirky specialist stores, offering everything from buttons and beads to model dinosaurs.
- There are over 120 food outlets along King Street and Enmore Road, serving some 20 ethnic cuisines – including Portuguese, Thai, African, Italian, Vietnamese, Indian, Japanese, Middle Eastern and even Scandinavian. Many of these restaurants and cafes are BYO and open until late, and most are very reasonably priced.
- There are also 23 pubs in the area, many of which serve food, and in Erskineville, Swanson Street and Erskineville Road are home to some good cafes and pub dining rooms.
- The vast amount of activities including the very vast and diverse shops, pubs, restaurants, and bars all add to the culture of the area and provide a myriad of options for people to travel to King Street, making it the vibrant and populated inner city neighbourhood that it currently is.
- It is clear to see that the diversity within King Street is largely due to the majority of the following criteria being heavily present. These criteria include branding, mixed uses, diversity, legibility, safety, connectivity, accessibility, transport, and sustainability.



King Street - <http://jamescharlesobrien.files.wordpress.com/2008/12/newtown.jpg>



King Street - <http://www.sydneyarchitecture.com/images/800px-NewtownAtNight.jpg>

INSIGHT AND OBSERVATION

The elements identified in this research chapter, encapsulate what, why and how to create a vibrant neighbourhood. These elements can be seen as the fundamental systems that create the fabric of human community and society. 'They are the tools for engineering vibrant communities as Hanlon states in his article 'Vibrant Communities'.

Another insight about vibrant neighbourhoods and communities is that it has always been more than just buildings. There is a sense of place that must be fed and nurtured just like, 'retaining residents and attracting commerce to sustain and propel the local economy; a must for cities...' (Hanlon 2008, p.83). Evidently, vibrant neighbourhoods and communities should strive for an ongoing narrative or vision, which in turn propels excitement, interest and opportunity.

In contrast, styled facades trying to mimic vibrant communities end up being unused and derelict buildings. An example of this is Newcastle's Hunter Street, the main street of the state's most important regional centre. At its current state, the street presents itself as a parade of boarded shopfronts and vandalised buildings where it was once considered architectural gems. Deputy chairman of the Newcastle trust, Keith Parsons, said that Newcastle council was 'the most anti-heritage and anti-community council we've seen in years'. (Jopson, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 Jun 2009) Such a problem indicates its failure to establish a narrative or vision. Instead it relied heavily on its architectural buildings for a vibrant neighbourhood.

In conclusion, a vibrant community is one that draws people in from other communities around the world to live, work and play. There is nothing more important than catering a neighbourhood, community or city for the population. After all, everyone is different and whatever works here, may not work elsewhere.



Baltimore Waterfront - <http://www.blogcdn.com/www.luxist.com/-media/2006/02/-innerharbor.jpg>



Berkeley People's Park - <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/11/People%27s-Park.jpg>

CRITICAL CONCLUSION TO THE BRIEF

A set of criteria was established to critically analyse the effect of a vibrant neighbourhood. However, which of those elements are relevant to the NextGen brief of (re)generation of vibrant neighbourhoods in Sydney? In my opinion, these are branding, accessibility and density.

Branding

Having a branded neighbourhood as you would with a city comes with social and economic benefits. For example, New York is a successful city because it had qualities that strong brands do, and marketed their history, quality of place, lifestyle, culture, diversity, and eventually formed cooperative partnerships between city municipalities and government in order to enhance their infrastructure and funding. Furthermore, in Hanlon's article, he reinforces this idea of branding of a vibrant community, as "a compilation of origin, creed, context, symbols and action that attracts people and commerce, and consumes resources." (Hanlon 2008, p.81) If the same philosophy applied to affordable housing or neighbourhoods, the effect would be promising.

Accessibility

In order for a vibrant neighbourhood to work, the accessibility of occupants is vital. Today's social, cultural and market, demands call for closer contact with the environment, more family and personal time. As RAIA President Howard Tanner identifies Sydney and Melbourne, "no longer convenient working entities" (Cameron, The Australian, 28 Aug 2008), accessibility is at the forefront of this.

Density

As the population of Sydney grows, housing demand increases. However, a tense tug-of-war is going on between developers and regulators – that is between those who want to push land development further out as to those who want to promote higher densities in areas already developed. (Cameron, The Australian, 28 Aug 2008) It is obvious that the reason for a developer to push land development further out is the profitable margin gained in housing.

However, for the sake of a vibrant neighbourhood, “Sydney must evolve to remain competitive by integrating density in both commercial and living spaces, social spaces and sustainable techniques into the CBD.” (Bibby, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 May 2009) Examples such as London and Rome “are densely populated but attractive to live in”. In turn such density brings in investors and imagination to the city, another opportunity for developers.

Ultimately from the research chapters, a vibrant neighbourhood is understood as the underlay for affordable housing. Both agendas interplay with each other to respond to the problems Sydney faces. One would not be work without the other, for example, in order for affordable housing to work, its neighbourhood will have to be vibrant to attract investors to buy it. Same Likewise with making a vibrant neighbourhood work, affordable housing must be available.



NOTES
